

Ilan Kelman  
Center for Capacity Building  
National Center for Atmospheric Research  
P.O. Box 3000  
Boulder, Colorado  
80307-3000, U.S.A.  
Phone +1-303-497-8122  
Fax +1-303-497-8125  
ilan\_kelman@hotmail.com

**Island Affairs: Integrating vulnerability into sustainability for isolated locations.**

<http://www.islandvulnerability.org/affairs.html>

Islands are isolated but inspiring, small yet fascinating. Past work illustrates the extensive vulnerabilities which islands face along with the impressive methods developed for coping with those vulnerabilities. For example, due to their small size, islands tend to experience large proportional impacts from even small events. Their marginalization often precludes detailed pre-disaster activities and rapid post-disaster actions. Yet the small size permits kinship-based systems for dealing with extreme events to link directly into national structures, potentially strengthening them. Highly-localized economies also build a flexibility which larger economic structures cannot emulate. Island lessons of experiencing and countering vulnerabilities provide a solid basis for connecting disaster-related activities with achieving improved sustainability.

How could the collective knowledge of islands and islanders be exchanged amongst isolated locations and transferred elsewhere? One mechanism borrows a concept implemented by Michael Glantz: “Affairs”. Rather than separating vulnerability from the sustainability process, “Affairs” creates a think-and-do space for integrating multiple issues. Thus, “Climate Affairs” is a book, workshops, and educational programs. “Desert Affairs” is an international research, education and application center. The six “Affairs” subdivisions are 1. Science, 2. Impacts, 3. Policy and Law, 4. Politics, 5. Economics, and 6. Ethics and Equity. The goal is to join, not divide, these categories. Anyone with interests in climate or deserts, from any perspective, finds a forum for interacting with others.

Island Affairs emerges naturally. To reflect island richness, the “Affairs” template is adapted to:

1. Islands: The basic elements for learning from islands.
2. Physical and Social Islands: How physical and social dimensions shape each other on islands.
3. Island Life: Includes livelihood-habitat interactions, transformations, and ethics.
4. Island Governance: Island-related decision-making, politics, policy, and law.
5. Island Interaction: Cross-cutting issues and connections with non-islands.

Each point is addressed through a series of questions with answers provided at three levels to form an information resource:

1. A one-page summary highlighting policy and practice implications.
2. A short article, usually 3-5 pages in length, written in easily-translatable plain language.
3. A detailed, academic approach with formal references, such as peer-reviewed journal papers.

Work is ongoing to define and answer questions. Contributions would be welcome.